



Embassy of the United States of America

Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown

December 13, 2012

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On 10th Year Anniversary, YES Salone Pays Courtesy Call on U.S. Ambassador

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – Nine young Sierra Leoneans who spent one year studying at a U.S. high school and their parents have seen the benefits of the study abroad opportunity on their personal growth and in their communities. On December 12, the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program alumni in Sierra Leone paid a courtesy call on U.S. Ambassador Michael Owen as part of the YES program's 10th anniversary.

Some of the YES alumni spoke about how the scholarship helped them to overcome their shyness and make new friends, gave them the opportunity to take part in activities such as horseback riding and skiing, and instilled in them the value of community service.

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy hosted a reception for the Sierra Leonean YES alumni. The event honored the more than 6,000 alumni from 45 countries, U.S. host families, host schools and communities, current YES students, overseas partner organizations, the U.S. Department of State, and U.S. Congress, especially the late Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Richard Lugar.

Public Affairs Officer Boa Lee gave a background about the YES program and its relevance in the lives of young people. She said the point of the YES program is not only to learn about American society and American culture, but also to acquire leadership skills and to share YES students' own cultures with Americans students and host families. Lee thanked parents of students who have participated in the YES program for their support and sacrifice in allowing their child to take part in the program. She applauded the alumni for their courage in experiencing a foreign world abroad. The PAO expressed optimism that the alumni will stay in touch with the friends they have made during their one year stay in the United States. "I am positive that the spirit of service learning, of dialogue, of leadership that you all acquired in the United States is something you are going to use to help yourselves, your friends, colleagues, your family members here in Sierra Leone," she said.

Three alumni students addressed the attendees about their experience in United States. They thanked the United States Embassy for the opportunity. They recalled the fun memories of attending U.S. schools and the activities that they participated in.

The coordinator for the YES program in Sierra Leone, Jane Peters of iEARN, said, “America has not only changed the lives of these young alumni, but it has changed the lives of many people in Sierra Leone.” She informed that the Sierra Leone YES alumni association now has nine members. She outlined volunteer programs undertaken by the YES alumni in Sierra Leone.

Senior secondary school students from Sierra Leone have received full scholarships to go to school in the United States since 2010. The program is managed locally through iEARN.

The YES Program was established by the U.S. Congress in October 2002 in response to the events of September 11, 2001. The program is funded through the U.S. Department of State and sponsored by the Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs (ECA). It provides scholarships for high school students (ages 15-17) from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the U.S.